

ADDRESS OF

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON,

PRINCIPAL OF

TUSKEGEE NORMAL AND INDUSTRIAL INSTITUTE,

TUSKEGEE, ALABAMA,

BEFORE THE

UNION LEAGUE CLUB,

BROOKLYN, FEBRUARY 12, 1896.

(Lincoln's Birthday.)

On Abraham Lincoln, "THE EMANCIPATOR."

REMARKS OF BOOKER T. WASHINGTON, PRINCIPAL OF
THE TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE, TUSKEGEE, ALA.,
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ON ABRAHAM LINCOLN, "THE EMANCIPATOR."

MR. PRESIDENT AND GENTLEMEN :—

You ask what the Great Emancipator found a piece of property and left an American citizen, to speak of Abraham Lincoln. My first acquaintance with our hero and benefactor is this: Night after night, before the dawn of day, on an old slave plantation in Virginia, I recall the form of my sainted mother bending over a batch of rags that enveloped my body, on a dirt floor, breathing a fervent prayer to Heaven that "Marsa Lincoln" might succeed, and that one day she and I might be free; and so on your invitation I come here to-night, Mr. President, to celebrate with you the answer to those prayers. But be it far from me to revive the bitter memories of the past, nor would I narrow the work of Abraham Lincoln to the black race of this country—rather I would call him the Emancipator of America—the liberator of the white man North, the white man South; the one who in unshackling the chains of the Negro, has turned loose the enslaved forces of nature in the South, and has knit all sections of our country together by the in-

dissoluble bonds of commerce. To the man in the North who cherished hatred against the South, Lincoln brought freedom. To the white man who landed at Jamestown years ago, with hopes as bright and prospects as cheering as those who stepped ashore on Plymouth Rock, Lincoln for the first time gave an opportunity to breathe the air of unfettered freedom; a freedom from dependence on others' labor to the independence of self-labor; freedom to transform unused and dwarfed hands into skilled and productive hands; to change labor from drudgery into that which is dignified and glorified; to change local commerce into trade with the world; to change the Negro from an ignorant man to an intelligent man; to change sympathies that were local and narrow into love and good will for all mankind—freedom to change stagnation into growth, weakness into power; yea, to us all, your race and mine, Lincoln has been a great emancipator. Even the treasures of nature in our Southland, that seemed to hide themselves from the hand of man, have felt the inspiring hand of freedom; and coal, and iron, and marble have leaped forth, and where once was the overseer's lash, steam and electricity make go the shop, the factory and the furnace.

NEEDS OF THE HOUR.

But all is not done, and it remains for us, the living, to finish the work that Lincoln left uncompleted. You of the great and prosperous North, still owe a serious and uncompleted duty to your less fortunate brothers of the white race South, who suffered

and are still suffering the consequence of American slavery. What was the task you asked them to perform? Returning to their destitute homes after years of war, to face blasted hopes, devastation, a shattered industrial system, you ask them to add to their burdens that of preparing in education, politics and economics, in a few short years, for citizenship, four or five millions of former slaves. That the South, staggering under the burden, made blunders that in some measure there has been disappointment, no one need be surprised.

The 4,000,000 slaves that Lincoln freed are now nearly 8,000,000 freemen. That which was three hundred years in doing, can hardly be undone in thirty years. How can you help the South and the Negro in the completion of Lincoln's work? A large majority of the people Lincoln freed are still ignorant, without proper food, or property, or skill, or correct habits; are without the requisites for intelligent and independent citizenship. The mere fiat of law could not make a dependent man independent; it could not make an ignorant voter an intelligent voter; it could not make one man respect another man. These results come by beginning at the bottom and working upwards; by recognizing our weakness as well as our strength; by tangible evidences of our worthiness to occupy the highest positions. Unfortunately too many of my people, because of ignorance, began at the top instead of the bottom; grasped for the shadow instead of the substance. We have spent time and money in attempting to go to Congress and

State Legislatures, that could better have been spent in becoming the leading real estate dealer or carpenter in our county. We have spent time and money in making political stump speeches and in attending political conventions, that could better have been spent in starting a dairy farm, or truck garden, and thus have laid a material foundation on which we could have stood and demanded our rights. I come to your State and say the German is ignorant, you point to the best paying truck farm, operated by a German. I say the German is without skill, you point to the largest machine shop in your city, owned and operated by a German. I say the German is lazy, you point to the most magnificent dwelling on your avenue, that is the result of the savings of the German, who began in poverty. I say the German cannot be trusted, you point to the German who is president of the largest bank. I say the German is not fitted for citizenship, you point me to the German who is the chief executive of your magnificent city—these are the kind of arguments that kill prejudice by the acre. When you come to Alabama and ask has the Negro executive ability, I want to show you, as I can at Tuskegee, Alabama, an institution of learning, originated and controlled by Negroes, where there are 750 students, 65 teachers, 23 industries, 38 buildings, 1,400 acres of land, \$225,000 worth of property. When you ask has the Negro mechanical skill, I want to show you the finest house in a county, planned and constructed by a Negro. When you ask is the Negro lazy, I want to show you the finest farm,

that is owned and operated by a Negro. When you ask is the Negro honest, I want to show you a Negro whose note is acceptable at the bank for \$5,000. When you ask is the Negro economical, I want to show you a Negro with \$50,000 in the bank. When you ask is the Negro fit for citizenship, I want to show you a Negro paying taxes on a cotton factory. I want to show you Negroes who stand at the front in the affairs of State, religion, education, mechanics, commerce and household economy. "By this sign we shall conquer." By this method we shall so knit our civil and business interests into that of the white man's, that when he prospers we shall prosper, when we fail he fails. By this method we shall crawl up, pull up or burst up.

Yes, in answer to your proclamation, Father Abraham, we are coming 8,000,000 strong—we are coming by the way of the college, by the way of agriculture, the shop, the factory, the trades, the household arts. With this foundation, if God is right and the Bible is true, there is no power that can permanently stay our progress.

You cannot graft a fifteenth century civilization into a twentieth century civilization by the mere performance of mental gymnastics. You cannot convert a man by abusing him. The mere pushing of knowledge into the heads of a people, without providing a medium through the hands for its use, is not always wise. The educated idle man is more dangerous than the ignorant idle man. An educated man standing on the corners of your streets

with his hands in his pockets, is not one whit more benefit to society than an ignorant man in the streets with his hands in his pockets. It is only as the black man produces something that makes the markets of the world dependent on him for something, will he secure his rightful place.

OBJECT LESSON.

Eight years ago I could have shown you a colored community in Alabama, that was in debt, mortgaging crops, living from hand to mouth on rented land, paying 15 to 40 per cent. interest on advances for food, school lasting three months, taught in a wreck of a log cabin, people of all ages and sexes huddled together, often to the number of six or eight in one room, and without habits of thrift or economy. A little more than a dozen years ago, four teachers, one a carpenter and blacksmith, one trained in agriculture, one in cookery, another in sewing, combined with literary education, went to this community. Go with me to that community to-day, and I will show you a large modern school house, with school lasting eight months, farms well cultivated and owned by colored people, who live in homes with two or three rooms. I will show you a people almost free from debt, and a gin, and a store, and a wheelwright and blacksmith shop operated by Negroes; a community that has the respect and confidence of the white citizens; a community that has been revolutionized in religion, education and industry. Let us multiply these communities in every part of the South. By this way we are coming; by this

way we are proving ourselves worthy of the confidence of our great emancipator. We mean to prove our worth, not by mere talk or complaints or fault-finding, and the rest, in a large measure, we leave with you.

HIGHER VIRTUES.

Nor shall we be lacking in the exercise of the higher virtues. In 1840 one of my race was sold from Virginia into Georgia. After serving his master in slavery for twenty years, seeing his children sold, his wife subjected to the lash and other hardships, at the command of Lincoln he became a freeman. Conditions reversed themselves. By industry and economy the ex-slave secures a comfortable home, educates and trains his children along industrial lines; he becomes prosperous and independent. In the meantime, his former master and mistress grow infirm, have reverses, going down till poverty and want are reached. The black man, the ex-slave, hears of the condition of his former owners, and at great expense and inconvenience finds his way to them. Grasping them by the hand, he lets them know that the past is forgotten, tells them of his prosperity and future hopes. This black man brings his former owners to his own home, builds for them a neat cottage, nurses them, feeds them, warms and protects and cheers them into happiness and contentment. This, this, my friends, is an example of the true emancipation; let white men, North and South, strive to match it, to excel it, if they can.

This is the new emancipation we seek to bring about at Tus-

kegee; to emancipate the white man to love the Negro; to emancipate the Negro to love the white man; to emancipate the Negro into habits of thrift, skill, economy and substantial character; to teach the Negro if another man is little, he can be great; if another man is mean he can be good; if others hold malice, he can cultivate charity. Thus rising day by day in stepping on our dead selves, we hope to help the black and the white man bring about that larger, that higher emancipation.



